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SUBJECT: BAGHDAD: SURGE IMPROVES SECURITY BUT CITY REMAINS
DIVIDED

REF: A. BAGHDAD 2834
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 2835
[1](#)C. BAGHDAD 2888
[1](#)D. BAGHDAD 1552

Classified By: Baghdad PRT Team Leader Andrew Passen for reasons 1.4 (b
,d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is a Baghdad PRT/Embassy POL reporting cable.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary: The focused efforts of the surge Brigades and ePRTs to dampen violence in Baghdad and to build relationships with local leaders have improved the security situation in many Baghdad neighborhoods. Baghdad, however, remains a divided city and a segregated province; any attempt to convert recent security gains into political progress must take into account Baghdad's fault lines. One of the most persistent dividing lines separates the city's 'core' from its 'periphery.' Distance from the geographical and political center, or core, plays a large role in limiting the power and resources available to Baghdad residents. Since central government leaders with a sectarian agenda control service provision in Baghdad, residents of the core usually receive more resources than do those on the periphery. While Sunni and Shia tribal leaders have drawn significantly closer to the core during the past six months, militants, extremists and political parties continue to drive a wedge between the core and the periphery, and to push secular moderates away from influential power centers such as the Provincial Council. This cable is the first in a three-part series focused on service provision as a means to achieve greater political unity in Baghdad. End Summary.

The Surge Has Created Windows of Opportunity

[1](#)3. (C) After more than six months of a calculated strategy to improve the security situation in Baghdad, the Baghdad Security Plan has produced an environment in which progress at lower levels may be exploited to bring greater political unity to Baghdad. These developments include a significant increase in the number, the variety, and the authenticity of engagements with local leaders who were formerly opposed to the Government of Iraq (GoI) and to reconciliation. The focused efforts of the surge brigades and ePRTs to dampen violence in Baghdad and to build relationships with local leaders have improved the security situation in many Baghdad neighborhoods. In many inner-city districts, such as Khadhamiya and Rasheed, ePRTs report that many citizens are fed up with militia influence over their behavior and their pocketbooks. Religious and tribal leaders are tentatively stepping forward to speak out against the corruptive influence of the militias and terrorists in their midst. Approximately 26,000 primarily Sunni local volunteers have stood up to collaborate with Coalition Forces and Iraqi Security Forces in the protection of Baghdad's neighborhoods and infrastructure.

14. (C) Where the Baghdad Security Plan has created 'Safe Markets' that have revived economic activity, locals now question the need for militia or insurgents to protect those sites, because of the extortion and control that always accompanies militant activity. In Ameriya, an area designated as a 'Safe Neighborhood' under the Baghdad Security Plan, local leaders found the confidence to turn against an al-Qaeda cell preying upon their community. In outlying communities such as Nasr Wa Salam, delicate but significant deals have been struck with local tribal leaders formerly inclined to support or permit insurgent activity among their followers. Rival Sunni and Shia tribal leaders in rural Furat are now willing to discuss their grievances in an open forum, brokered by Coalition and Embassy personnel.

But Baghdad Remains Divided between 'Core' and 'Periphery'

15. (C) Despite this progress, Baghdad remains a divided city and a segregated province. While division assumes many forms in Baghdad, one of the most persistent dividing lines separates the city's 'core' from its 'periphery.' This division stems in part from Baghdad's basic structure as a province with a metropolitan hub surrounded by outlying suburban counties or "qadas." Distance from the center, or 'core,' plays a large role in defining how much a citizen can expect to receive from his government. This distance reflects a geographical truth: within downtown Rusafa district, for instance, residents are never more than a few blocks from a government office, warehouse or public facility. At the far reaches of rural Abu Ghraib qada, government institutions are largely non-existent.

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16. (C) The tension between the core and the periphery in Baghdad also reflects a political truth: the Shia religious political parties and their associated militias form the 'political core' of Baghdad. Winning control of most government institutions in January 2005 -- in elections that were boycotted by most Sunnis -- gave those Shia parties access to the lion's share of the resources of the state, and the right to fight over the distribution of those resources amongst themselves. Through intimidation, coercion and murder, militias associated with these Shia parties have brought political disputes into the streets of Baghdad, along with the militias' simultaneous pursuit of criminal, religious and sectarian agendas.

Centralization Exacerbates Core-Periphery Divide

17. (C) The government's inability to effectively decentralize the provision of essential services has contributed to the fact that residents of the core receive more resources than do those on the periphery. Nearly all services are provided by offices of national ministries, with decisions about the method and manner of the distribution of those services still being made at very high levels of national government. Officials put in place by Shia religious parties increasingly dominate the national ministries that provide these services; locals consistently allege that party and sectarian interests inform the decisions of these officials. As a result, representatives serving on the local councils of Baghdad's neighborhoods and villages report that they have very little authority over the provision of services in their communities. Even Provincial Council members representing the most powerful political parties in Iraq complain that they are largely ignored by officials in the national ministries. A persistently centralized approach has thus ensured that the same major parties currently limiting progress toward reconciliation at the national level can also distribute services to Baghdad's neighborhoods along

sectarian lines.

Most Sunnis Live on the 'Periphery'

18. (C) Baghdad's Sunni population comprises a large portion of those who currently find themselves on the province's political 'periphery.' Neglect by the central government of Sunni-majority qadas has provided residents of these communities an incentive to join insurgent groups dedicated to overthrowing the government. Many residents of Sunni neighborhoods inside metropolitan Baghdad, however, such as Adhamiya, live close to the geographic center of Baghdad, but not to its Shia 'political core.' By contrast, Shia enclaves in Baghdad's qadas, such as Abu Ghraib's 'White Gold Village,' enjoy more services and better security than do Sunni areas on the geographical periphery, because residents of White Gold Village have connections to Shia political parties at Baghdad's political core.

19. (C) Some key decisions by Sunni leaders contributed to the marginalization of Sunnis in Baghdad. The choice to boycott the elections of January 2005, for instance, deprived many would-be Sunni leaders of the opportunity to prove their worth to Shia moderates willing to give them the benefit of the doubt. That missed opportunity provided ammunition to extremists on both sides, permitting them to widen the divide between the Sunni and Shia populations. Sunni extremists stepped in to fill the void that moderate Sunni leaders might have filled, promising through violent insurgency to win back Sunni control of the state, in the long run, and to win Sunni control of local resources and services, in the short run.

Militants Foment Division by Dominating 'Space' and 'Systems'

10. (C) Militants and corrupt officials also contribute to the neglect of Baghdad's periphery by dominating the neighborhoods and distribution networks that comprise the key spaces and systems throughout the province. Government systems designed to provide services in Baghdad have been disrupted or corrupted at various levels, starting with a legitimately elected, militia-associated politician at the top of the chain, through various mid-level officials with habits of graft, incompetence or absenteeism, and on down to thugs who seize control of the neighborhood gas station at the point of a gun. Sometimes aided and abetted by their political allies within the government, militants often co-opt and control the provision of services, and then provide those services to selected constituents or to those

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willing to pay the right amount (reftels A - C). The challenge of improving governance in Baghdad is thus both geographic and systemic. To truly secure a neighborhood in Baghdad, and to ensure the equitable, effective provision of services to Baghdad's peripheral communities, the USG must help the GoI to tackle two connected problems: protecting physical space, and guaranteeing the performance of the government systems that provide services in that space.

Tribes Search for a Relationship to the Core

11. (C) Tribal networks, both Sunni and Shia, have seen their relationship to the state - and to Baghdad's political core - vary according to the whims of the regimes that have come and gone. Tribes form the social fabric of many Iraqi communities, and often transcend the bounds of geography, political party, and even religious sect. The 'ground-up' reconciliation process in Iraq, which began in Anbar before spreading to Baghdad, has thus far relied on the tacit recognition that tribal leaders and networks are key

stakeholders in Iraq; if they inform and guide government priorities, then they are less likely to undermine state institutions. Some tribal leaders have begun to draw closer to the core by entering national or provincial institutions, while others have thus far preferred to advise and influence key leaders from outside formal structures. As they turn away from the insurgents, al-Qaeda, and militias, Sunni and Shia tribal leaders have expressed an interest in developing an alternative means to access national and local resources, and to influence national and local decisions. Baghdad leaders such as Governor Hussein al-Tahan (ISCI/Badr) have begun to recognize that the provincial and national government must respond to the needs and interests articulated by tribal leaders, and must treat all tribal members as equal citizens.

Secular Moderates Marginalized by Party Politics

¶12. (C) Once forming the core of Baghdad's post-war political scene, secular moderates have found themselves increasingly pushed to its periphery. The elections of January 2005 transformed local politics in Baghdad and weakened the position of the locally-selected secular moderates who populate Baghdad's municipal government and local councils (ref: D). During the election of a new Provincial Council (PC) by a party-list vote, representatives of sect-based political parties took over a body that originally comprised representatives of each of Baghdad's 15 districts. Prior to January 2005, PC members represented constituents in Karadah, Sadr City, Abu Ghraib and the other districts that make up Baghdad province. Since January 2005, members of the PC have instead represented ISCI, Da'wa, Fadhila and other major political parties. Of the PC's 51 members, 45 represent Shia religious parties, and all members sit on the Provincial Council at the pleasure of their respective party leadership.

¶13. (C) Through legitimate elections, the Shia religious parties and their associated militias thus cemented their hold over provincial government and many of the services provided at the provincial and district levels. As a result, the past two years have seen the marginalization of the secular moderates at the local level, and a reduction in the quantity and quality of services provided in predominantly Sunni areas of Baghdad province. Secular moderates in technocratic positions in provincial and municipal government have, in many instances, been replaced by Shia party loyalists. Also, members of local councils have seen their powers curtailed by the Provincial Council. They have faced infiltration and intimidation by militia members with ties to Shia party politicians.

¶14. (C) Comment: Identifying how Baghdad is divided and what factors create the distance between its diverse political communities defines the major challenges of bringing unity to Baghdad, but also provides methods for achieving this unity. With the opportunities presented by improvements in the security environment and the attendant increase among local leaders expressing willingness to engage with the central government, willing partners within the Government of Iraq may be able to bridge these divisions through more effective delivery of essential services. End Comment.
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